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FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY BANJUL PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 201536

OFFICIAL INFORMAL

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/11/2013

TAGS: PGOV, PREL

SUBJECT: ITEM OF INTEREST FROM LONDON

CLASSIFIED BY: AF/W DEPUTY CHRIS DATTA

1. (C) AMBASSADOR: OUR AFRICA WATCHERS IN LONDON THOUGHT YOU WOULD BE INTERESTED IN THE BELOW ITEMS. NO ACTION REQUIRED.

(U) GUANTANAMO DETAINEES STORM INTENSIFIES; PM WRITES THE SECRETARY; ALLEGATIONS OF TORTURE IN BAGRAM

(U) NEARLY-ALL UK MEDIA HIGHLIGHTED THE UK DETAINEE STORY, DESCRIBING U.S. BEHAVIOR. THE "ECONOMIST" WEEKLY, USUALLY SYMPATHETIC TO THE USG, RAN ON ITS COVER, "UNJUST, UNWISE, UNAMERICAN: WHY TERRORIST TRIBUNALS ARE WRONG." THE DAILY PAPERS ALL TRUMPETING WHAT WAS PERCEIVED AS A U-TURN BY PM BLAIR IN CALLING FOR THE BRITISH SUSPECTS TO BE TRIED IN THE UK. THE STORIES KEYED-OFF A STATEMENT FROM THE PM'S OFFICE, RELEASED LATE ON JULY 10, THAT SAID:

"...WE HAD BEEN IN REGULAR DISCUSSIONS WITH THE U.S. ABOUT THE DETAINEES FROM THE TIME THE FIRST UK NATIONALS HAD ARRIVED THERE IN JANUARY 2002. SINCE THEN, WE HAD PRESSED THE U.S. CONSISTENTLY TO RESOLVE THE SITUATION. AT NO TIME HAD WE ENDORSED THE IDEA OF MILITARY COMMISSIONS. ALTHOUGH IT WAS IMPORTANT FOR US TO KEEP IN TOUCH WITH U.S. THINKING, WE HAD NOT GIVEN TACIT APPROVAL, PLAYED ANY PART OR ASSISTED THE U.S. IN ANY WAY WITH PROCEDURES FOR THE COMMISSIONS. OUR DISCUSSIONS WITH THE U.S. AUTHORITIES HAD FOCUSED ON MAKING IT CLEAR TO THEM THAT THE DETAINEES SHOULD RECEIVE A FAIR

TRIAL. ASKED FOR A REACTION TO TODAY'S FINANCIAL TIMES REPORT IN WHICH IT HAD BEEN SUGGESTED THAT THE HOME SECRETARY HAD TURNED DOWN THE U.S.'S OFFER TO REPATRIATE THE SIX (SIC) BRITISH DETAINEES, THE PM'S OFFICE UNDERLINED THAT THE HOME SECRETARY HAD NEVER BLOCKED ANY PROPOSAL TO TRY THE DETAINEES IN THE UK. HE SAID THAT SINCE THE U.S. WAS THE DETAINING POWER, THEY HAD DECIDED TO TRY THE DETAINEES UNDER U.S. JURISDICTION. ASKED IF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL HAD ADVISED THE GOVERNMENT AS TO THE PROVISIONS OF THE GENEVA OR HAGUE CONVENTIONS UNDER WHICH THE DETAINEES WERE BEING HELD, THE PM'S OFFICE SAID THAT WE NEVER COMMENTED ON ADVICE FROM THE ATTORNEY GENERAL."

(C)

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THE UK ALSO INFORMED JOURNALISTS THAT FOREIGN SECRETARY STRAW JULY 10 SENT A LETTER -- CLOSELY COORDINATED WITH PRIME MINISTER AND HOME SECRETARY -- TO THE SECRETARY OUTLINING THE GOVERNMENT'S CONCERNS.

(U) A NEW ASPECT WAS ADDED TO THE CONTROVERSY AS THE "GUARDIAN" PUBLISHED FRONT-PAGE ALLEGATIONS THAT TWO LONDON BUSINESSMEN, BISHAR AL-RAWI AND JAMIL AL-BANNA (BOTH UK PERMANENT RESIDENTS) WERE ARRESTED, ALONG WITH TWO UK NATIONALS, LAST NOVEMBER ON ARRIVAL IN GAMBIA. AFTER BEING DETAINED BY LOCAL POLICE FOR A MONTH, "THEY WERE HANDED OVER TO U.S. AGENTS WHO FLEW THEM TO A CIA INTERROGATION CENTER AT BAGRAM AIRBASE IN AFGHANISTAN, BEFORE BEING TRANSFERRED TO CAMP DELTA IN CUBA WHERE THEY HAVE BEEN HELD SINCE MARCH." THE ARTICLE FURTHER ALLEGES THAT UK AUTHORITIES PASSED INFORMATION TO THE U.S. WHICH LED TO THEIR DETENTION. "THE FOREIGN OFFICE HAS DENIED ASKING GAMBIA TO ARREST THEM... (BUT) WILL NOT PRESS U.S. AUTHORITIES OVER THE MEN'S FATE BECAUSE THEY ARE NOT BRITISH CITIZENS." THE ARTICLE THEN RECOUNTS ALLEGATIONS BY AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL AND OTHER NGOS THAT THERE IS A CIA-RUN "TORTURE LIGHT" INTERROGATION FACILITY AT BAGRAM.
POWELL

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